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Gems of the Prairies

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Gems of the Prairies

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By

A. O. Halvorson

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To My Wife

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I know that I'm near to my God when I write,
That my soul soars on high and my heart is contrite,
And communion I hold with the spirits of light.

The verses on the opposite page are the results of my first poetical efforts.

They constitute a letter in poetic form written in appreciation of gifts sent to me and my family by my wife's three sisters and her one brother.

—The Author.

St. John, North Dakota,
Christmas Day, 1922.

(Tune: "There's Music In The Air")

My own dear sweethearts three,
Now I wish to thank you all,
In merry melody,
For the gifts you sent us four.

Chorus:

Blessings of life, may they flow
Most abundantly to you.
That is my wish now and aye
On our lifes' uncertain way.

And when you sing this song,
Then remember brother too.
Let thoughts each others throng
And remind you of our love.

At Christmas tide turn back
To our happy childhood home,
Our thoughts, to brother love,
And to sisters' fond embrace.

We thank you all for gifts
That do bridge the space between.
They make it light the shifts
Of our life to take each day.

A merry Christmastide
And a New Year's happy sway
May aye with you abide
From now till life's last day.

Affectionately yours,

Alfred.

The Turtle Mountains are located in Bottineau and Rolette Counties in the northern part of North Dakota and extend over the international boundary into Canada.

The Turtle Mountains—The Year Around

The Turtle Mountains are very low;
But they are high enough for me.
They were not made for show;
But they break the monotony.

In winter time they are pure and white,
And they are not pretentious then:
They stand for what is right
And also what is just 'mong men.

And when in spring they are budding out,
They show their kindly nature true,
In splendid beauty sprout;
They then bear flowers of many a hue.

In summer time they are green and strong.
And then they show a wholesome pride,
As people do when young:
They're 'live and care for nought beside.

Then autumn makes a more gorgeous show
In colors red and brown and gold.
Some are pale, other glow,
And some are timid, others bold.

In winter, summer, in spring and fall,
O'er years' and life's much-winding trail,
May right, truth, strength, beauty, all
For what they stand for aye prevail.

The Turtle Mountains—A Gift of God

The Turtle Mountains on the horizon-line
Are but a streak of blue:
You do not see their forests fine,
Their thousand flowers of varied hue.

You think them hills, for no ice nor peaks you find,
And you are right for sure;
The ice no ice did leave behind:
But then the air is free and pure.

You cannot know from a distant sight alone
What charms their bosom holds.
You cannot know what precious stone
Adorns their dress of many folds.

You must obtain a much nearer view to see
Their many beauties rare:
You must come close, not distant be,
If their sweet pleasure you would share.

Then lakes and valleys, flowers and birds you'll find,
And you'll be glad you came;
For thoughts will come, such that are kind,
And you will not go home the same.

You cannot help but nobler be as you look
On Nature's work of art,
That God from out His storehouse took
And gave to us as our part.

He gave us these with intention kind and good
That we should use them well,
That we should mind His fatherhood,
For pottage not our birthright sell.

Kind Nature's beauties t' enjoy our birthright is:
The pottage is what men
Contrive and substitute for this;
We must not look for pleasure then.

But here we come for pleasure sweet, pure and deep.
As we depart from this,
Throughout our hearts and souls doth sweep
A feeling that's akin to bliss.

"OUR NORTH DAKOTA" may be sung to the tune "Throw Me A Rose."

OUR NORTH DAKOTA

Our North Dakota's a wonderful state,
By far the best of the forty-eight.
If you don't believe what I say,
Just listen a while to my little lay.

Its surface flat and its undulant hills
In hearts of ours a sad yearning stills
For a change of scenes that we feel
That cannot be stilled by another 'ppeal.

The Turtle Mountains in northernmost part,
The Killdeer Mountains in western start,
And the Bad Lands farther are south:
They can be described by no word of mouth.

And clay that's yellow and clay that is blue
To hills and dales give a glorious hue.
As great joy in similar way
Give soil that is black and the sand that's gray.

The red and yellow and bluish and gray!
"Oh, dear," you say, "what a place to play,
Among brightly colored hills,
In valleys, on plains, along ripply rills."

We here raise barley, and corn, yea, and oats,
And horses, numberless cows and shoats.
And our flax and grasses are tall,
While wheat's the most bounteous crop of all.

But still a much dearer crop do we own:
Our boys and girls, who are soon full-grown,
And who some day our places'll take,
The future of this great state brighter'll make.

And people have we from every land:
To work, to live they have come, and plan.
They have fallen into the pot:
To melt them together is now our lot.

The English "Ah weally" is often o'erheard.
The Irish "Bejabers" is never third.
And the Finnish "Hyve Paiva"
Consorts with the Noresman's vulgar "Sleiva."

The German often we meet, "Ja, ja, ja."
We greet the French with "Comment sa va."
We salute the natives "Bushu Niche,"
Say many a word that does sound fishy.

The Jew, the Russian, the Syrian, the Jap,
The Negro, Spanish, the Dutch, the Lap,
And the Chinese, Portugese, Greek,
Our language them all we must teach to speak.

And poets have we had, statesmen of note,
And women and things of which others wrote.
Now you know why our great state
By far is the best of all forty-eight.

THEODORE ROOSEVELT

A few misguided people say
That Roosevelt was a misfit sad,
And that his influence on our youth today
Indeed is very, very bad.

It is a risk to contradict
So wise a group as these must be;
But certainly we must the truth depict
So all may see it whole and free.

They say we must not worship men
Nor down before the heroes kneel.
This is in truth my doctrine too, but then—
They do not act the way they feel.

For hero-worship is their creed
Full just as much as other men.
To worship God! For that they see no need.
So, pray, whom shall we worship then?

But as to Roosevelt's misfit sad—
We cannot help but like the man:
He was so wide, so deep, no passing fad
Could still his yearning for a nation strong.

Although his childhood was so weak
That he was nigh to death in town,
He soon grew strong when he came here to seek
The air that turns the white to brown.

He rode the horse, he chased the cow,
And wolves and bears and lions shot.
The lariat always hung from saddle-bow;
In danger great he trembled not.

And when in time a war broke out
And Cuba must be freed at last,
His riders gathered 'round him with a shout:
Nor he nor they could go too fast.

On Santiago's famous hill
He led them boldly, bravely up.
He showed us then that he had dunk his fill
From Nature's choice embold'ning cup.

In industry, in commerce, trade,
In peace, in war, at home, abroad,
He always acted just and sane and made
Us see we must abandon fraud.

He was a man of wide repute.
Well-known he was o'er all the world.
'Tween countries two he settled a dispute,
In foreign parts our flag unfurled.

And histories of worth he wrote,
And books of travel he composed.
Well versed he was in Nature's lore. Remote
From men he was in joy inclosed.

He did not need at all the sight
Of men to make him glad and cause
Him to exert himself: his might
Seemed greatest when alone he was.

He was a soldier strong and brave.
He was a hunter bold and sure.
He was a writer, learned, wise, suave.
He was a statesman golden pure.

In fact, he truly was so much,
And was it all forsooth so well,
We cannot hope to find another such,
Who can so easily care dispel.

He was, indeed, so versatile,
His heart so big, his mind so keen,
We may consider him our model still,
And yet enjoy his mem'ry's sheen.

Forsooth, we do not need believe
All that he said, nor do what he
Did do, but still we cannot help but grieve
That he so soon called out should be.

And if I now may speak my mind,
Right here I wish to say that he
Was just as good and great and strong and kind
As these misguided folks can be.

WOODROW WILSON

Although he walked a narrow path and straight,
His plans included all the world,
His care to see our country's fate
Safeguarded be where'er our flag's unfurled.

His thoughts were always lofty, noble, pure,
And brotherhood his theme he made.
Ideals high helped him endure
The casting of his motives in the shade.

The truth and justice of his glorious aim
His heart bereft of all distrust:
He thought that all so just a claim
Must entertain and not tramp down in dust.

But woe to him! He had not learned to know
The depths of heart of men that lead
The destinies of nations low,
Who mind their own, but see no others need.

He did not know the roaring lion's greed,
Nor tiger's inborn appetite
For wealth and power, on which they feed,
And which they get from gendering hate and spite.

No saint he was; enough grave faults he had,
But not the kind that's held in store
By worldly statesmen going mad
With envy, jealousy's cantankerous sore.

Duplicity that was unknown to him
His footsteps stalked at every turn.
And secret plans of conquest grim
Confronted him and made his heart to burn.

In open he was always used to act:
In open now he likewise thought
It possible to form a pact
Preventing nations being sold and bought.

Alas! how much too soon he learned his trust
And confidence in man was mocked
And laughed at, ridiculed and thrust
Aside, and selfishness from heart unlocked.

Too late he learned he was so far, so far
Ahead of time that few could stay
Abreast of him, and few the star
Could see that showed to him his way.

He found the world at large was deaf and blind
To sound and light that opened path
To brotherhood, relation kind,
'Tween man and man, destroyed war's aftermath.

No wonder that his heart at last did break,
When he discovered that his work
Was done in vain. What he at stake
Had thought they'd lightly pass and duty shirk.

All honor give to him that now has died
From anguish caused by soul's remorse,
Whose triumph is that he has tried
To better things and not to make them worse.

Now let him have the well-deserved peace
For which he prayed and worked so hard.
Let us take care it never cease,
But let us be forevermore its guard.

THE STORM

The storm approaches in the western sky;
The clouds hang low and dark and threaten harm
To trees and garden, livestock, grain and farm:
We marvel at th' almighty power on high.
We fear the danger that is drawing nigh:
The hail it may contain doth cause alarm.
What has been raised and built by force of arm
May now be wiped away and taken by
The hand that lavishly did give to us.
We do know now that we but stewards are,
That nothing we call ours is safe and sure,
Except as God Himself doth will it thus.
But when the storm is past and from afar
The thunder roars, God must our pride endure.

AFTER THE STORM

The sun is out again, the storm is past.
We see the clouds sail swiftly to the east.
The lightning's stopped, the thundering has ceased.
We heave a sigh and breathe more free at last
To think that danger now again so fast
Sped by and did no harm to man or beast;
But simply showed that God can make us feast
Our eyes upon His fire displays so vast
They reach from earth to heaven and back to earth,
That He permits our listening to the roar
Of thunder strong enough the universe
To shake and make to tremble and give birth
To fear in hearts of men and, what is more
In harmony to hear His wind rehearse.

THE FOG

Thou dreary fog and dull, thou ne'er wilt lift,
But wilt forever heav'ly weigh me down:
Methinks I see in thee God's hostile frown,
Since He in thee will not permit a rift.
I wonder if not soon He will let sift
Through thy aerial substance from His crown
Some rays of light that will show me my ground,
That will allow me for myself to shift.
I feel downhearted, sad: He's filled my cup
With absent joy. He will not let me see
What grand surprise for me He has in store.
I wonder why He does not take thee gently up,
As I attempt to do with seafoam free—
But see, God smiles through rifts—He frowns no more.

THE SNOW IS FALLING

The snow is falling slowly, gently down.
It spreads an airy mantle pure and white.
It lays it smoothly, evenly and right
O'er pasture, field and meadow, lake and town.
It covers all, if it be black or brown.
And if there's need, 'twill boldly fight
What tries to hinder it. It makes it tight
And warm and snug and fit, just like a gown.
What wonder it so gladly welcomed is?
It is so pretty, gentle, mild, and soft.
It is so white and fluffy, light and clean.
It brings along to us a welcome bliss
E'en as it comes from parts so far aloft,
And kindly covers all that's low and mean.

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THE BLIZZARD

When God, howe'er, His brushes takes in hand
To dust the surface of this earth of ours,
The wind He makes doth show His mighty powers:
No one against His heavenly force can stand.
He comes as with a mighty giant band
And lifts the helpless snow to heights of towers
And throws it down again until it cowers
In piles and heaps, no longer in demand.
Its character at once has changed: we fear
Its cold and clammy touch upon our cheek.
It fills our eyes and takes our breath away.
It makes the outlook dark; there is no cheer
To keep our spirits up: we get so weak
We do not care, if we find home or stray.

THE NORTHERN LIGHT—

What is it?

Perchance the gates of Hell are thrown ajar
To let the heat escape and pain relieve.
I see the shadows of the damned conceive
To pull and tug at chains of iron bar:
They're always flitting back and forth so far
As fetters will allow them to retrieve
A might of happiness which they believe
Must be for all out there by yonder star.
I seem to see the yellow sulphur flame
That sputters, rises, spreads, and dies again.
Its work is done; a soul condemned is burned:
I all but hear the cries of pain that come
Before it burns itself to naught, and then—
Too soon back to their place the gates are turned.

OR—

Perchance that God a side door opens wide
And lets His angels out to play a while.
They come, a host of spirits, file on file,
And hover o'er the starry deep. Their pride
And gratefulness they show as they abide
The time allotted to their stay and beguile
The same as best they may in grandest style.
They deftly turn their flight from side to side.
They fold and then unfold their gauzy wings
E'en as they flit from star to star.
Is this they way they'll come on Judgment Day?
It sets us all to thinking serious things.
See yonder quivering shimmer from afar:
The angels march to work in grand array.

OR—

Perchance that God has drawn the veil aside
That daily shuts His throne from out our view,
And lets us now enjoy the glorious hue
That shines about Him and those by His side.
The veil waves back and forth just like the tide
That surges and recedes, and then anew
It waves and shows us red and white and blue
And all the colors that between abide.
I see the flickering of the brilliant light
That is emitted from His throne on high.
It beckons us to cease our struggling here
And bend our efforts on an upward flight
To join Him in His realm up in the sky—
The veil is drawn: We're back to earthly sphere.

"Oh, Hasn't He Got a Face That Is Kind?"

(Dedicated to Richard Randlett)

"Oh, hasn't he got a face that is kind?"
The little chap cried as he wonderingly gazed at the beautiful sight:
Sir Galahad's portrait confronted him there.
But background and trees were lost to his mind,
And fiery horse and ornaments bright.
The youth of the knight and the tint of his hair,
The whiteness of steed, the dawn of the day,
The sword and the armor, the helmet and shield had faded away.

"Oh, hasn't he got a face that is kind?"
He saw but the face of the youth who was ready to start on his quest.
He saw in this face as a trait by itself
The kindness of heart we in righteousness find,
The courage that comes at duty's request,
The beauty of soul spurning power and pelf,
The poise of the life that's purity's mate,
The fineness of features of such that are always morally straight.

"Oh, hasn't he got a face that is kind?"
To him there was nothing in beauty of dawn or in outward display,
In greenness of grass or in sweetness of air:
To all of these things he was totally blind.
He heeded not now the martial array,
No, nothing but courage to do and to dare.
The calling of Nature could not his gaze
Divert, for so strongly appealed to his soul that wonderful face.

"Oh, hasn't he got a face that is kind?"
The face of the knight to the wondering child stood so out in relief.
All else he forgot, neither cared he for more.
My face, may it show what is hidden behind.
May kindness appear, show forth my belief,
That thus may be seen what my thoughts have in store,
That thus may be seen they've learned where to find
A reason for saying: "Oh, hasn't he got a face that is kind?"

GOOD NEIGHBORS

I was making the lunch that memorable day,
I made it alone in my impractical way,
When our neighbor to the left stuck her head through the door
And asked who was sick.
She had seen the physicians fordore
Pull up at our gate and she came over quick.
I told her that morning my wife was sick in her bed
With the gas on her stomach and a pain in her head.

When the news spread around our neighbor on the right
Came racing along inquiring into our plight.
She had heard from another my wife was not well.
She acted so nice
And she offered to do what befell
For all of us folks: We could never surmise
Why she should be sorry my wife was sick in her bed
With the gas on her stomach and a pain in her head.

In the days that came after all came around
Kept cheering us up, so joy and solace we found.
Say, but not only that, they brought victuals to eat,
And ice cream and cake,
And potatoes and bullion and meat,
And freshly baked bread, like mother used to make.
It almost seemed good that my wife was sick in her bed,
With that gas on her stomach and that pain in her head.

I could never explain it, but it seemed good,
This loving kindheartedness of bringing the food.
Now the victuals were good, but much better was still
The bigness of hearts
Which the gifts have exposed, and the will
To aid: It is warming my innermost parts
E'en now, not just then when my wife was sick in her bed,
With the gas on her stomach and a pain in her head.

THE WAY TO SUCCESS

O, can you not see the way to success?
It lies there before you blazed out in a line.
Its cross-roads and byways and windings and turns
Are strewn with the wrecks of the millions that passed it before,
While the highway itself is open and clear,
And beckons you out to venture thereon,
And urges you on to join in the race,
Thus putting to test both your courage and pluck.

O, can you not see the way to success?
The signs along side it should make it so plain
As ever you'd wish it appear to your eye.
As soon as the first one you're passing the second appears,
And the third and the fourth and the rest in their turn.
And then you go on and leave them behind
Until you have reached the goal that you sought
And feel the contentment that's rightfully yours.

The wrecks are of those who heeded no sign
And watched not the corners and turns when they came,
But carelessly speeded attempting to pass
The rest of the folks that were trying to follow the rules.
In the corners they utterly failed to take care,
The edge of the road they ventured too close.
Their vehicles wrecked they toddle along
Mere shadows of that which they formerly were.

The signs you obey are variously made.
The first one you meet flashes honesty out.
Uprightness the next in its turn blazes forth,
And usefulness, tact and highmindedness swiftly pass by,
While a smile and a cheer and a hearty hand shake
Points on to simplicity's station ahead.
Now modesty, patience, courage appear,
While character over them all is inscribed.

It's perfectly sure and perfectly safe
To travel the well-laid-out road to success,
If only you practice the safety rules,
If only you go with a moderate speed and no more,
And you read all the signs as you're speeding along,
And carefully follow directions they give,
And do not run down your fellowman's car,
But give to your neighbor the rights that you crave.

The newspaper article below appeared in a Twin City newspaper in October 1925.

Ship Captain Finds Old Asiatic City On Caspian Sea Bottom

Moscow, Oct. 28—(AP)—The discovery of an ancient submerged city near Shikov, on the Caspian Sea, was made today by Alexis Atayev, a soviet captain.

Atayev's ship, bound from Persia to Baku, accidently changed its course, and while soundings were being made, he noticed buildings on the sea floor.

Atayev asserts that under the bright sunshine he could distinguish streets and buildings of ancient Asiatic architecture. A further investigation revealed a well preserved roadway leading to the Baku fortress.

Archaeologists are of the opinion it is the lost city of Karadasheger, believed to have been submerged centuries ago by an earthquake which altered the whole coastline. Inhabitants have the tradition that several other cities were destroyed by the same earthquake.

KARADASHEGER

It was a day of delight
To Karadasheger:
Her flowers were blooming most fragrant perfumes.
Her birds in their bowers were singing their sweetest.
Her innocent children were playing with glee.
Her youths and her maidens were cooing their coyest.
Her matrons and sages were carefree and joyous:
All was so safe;
No danger could threaten this city
Of Karadasheger.

It was a day of suspense
For Karadasheger:
The atmosphere thickened, the sun turning red.
It seemed an ill omen was filling the ether.
It was as if something that could not be seen
Was threatening this city and frightening her people.
The lurid of soul and the downcast of spirit
Now held their sway
Throughout this gay city, this city
Of Karadasheger.

It was a day of affright
For Karadasheger:
The rumblings of thunder ne'er rumbled so loudly,
When darkness of night fell upon this gay city.
The dustclouds they saw were results of the shock
That doomed to destruction this gayest of people.
The yawning abysses enveloped the living,
Swallowed them all.
Not one of them safely left the city
Of Karadasheger.

It was a day of oblivion
For Karadasheger:
For thousands of years it was hidden from view.
The Caspian waters had well done their duty.
No trace did they leave that could show men the way
To where this gay city had stood in her glory.
The Caspian bottom had well kept her secret:
All was oblivion.
No longer men knew of this city
Of Karadasheger.

INTROSPECTION

Far down in my heart I find a recess
That needs must be filled with a thought that is good,
Or else it will mould and will form an abscess
That will fester my system and spoil my manhood.

Way back in my mind I know there is space
For yet an idea that's worthwhile and pure.
I must not forget now to put it in place,
This idea of mine that will ever endure.

I know there's a mite to do for my hands.
It's work that is needed and's not done in vain.
It does not bring fame; but in memory stands;
For it shows what a man with a will can attain.

I DO NOT CARE—

I do not care what people think,
So long as I am safe with God,
From all the pitfalls on whose brink
I walk as on through life I plod.
Let their thoughts be good or bad,
With kind intent or purpose mean;
They will not make my pathway sad,
They will not touch my mind serene.

I do not care what people say
Or on my back or to my face,
So long as truth is my mainstay
And I my words do not misplace.
Slander rife and words of hate,
They will not reach my depth of heart:
Too weak they are my zeal abate,
Just so with spite and jealous dart.

I do not care what people do
So long as I am doing right.
In secret place, in open too,
The right I'll do with all my might.
Others' deeds will not disturb
My peace or plan, but only make
Me try the more my will to curb
And so the narrow path to take.

Let others think, and say and do
Whate'er they please; they cannot harm
The thoughts I have, the words I say,
The deeds I do, that bring me charm.
Other thoughts, or words, or deeds,
I pray I may not have in mind
Or mouth or hand, but only needs
Of such may see, such that are kind.

I WISH—

I wish that thoughts, profound and deep,
Would come to me at beck and call,
That I with Wisdom tryst could keep,
That she might benefit us all.
But thoughts of mine are not so born;
They're shallow, mean and low.
They very easily turn to scorn
And do not from a right heart flow.

I wish that words with solace filled
From out my mouth would gently flow,
With wisdom fraught that never killed
A kind response's afterglow.
But thus flow not the words of mine;
They're bitter, base and cold.
They very easily do confine
Themselves to rancors out of old.

I wish that deeds both great and good
From out my hands could issue forth,
That they for right had always stood,
And just for things that are of worth.
But deeds that I must now call mine
Are worthless, useless, dead and worse;
They will not in this world e'er shine,
But only cause me soul's remorse.

I wish that thoughts and words and deeds
Would altogether be of use,
Of worth, of gain, that he who heeds
May wisdom get, not time abuse.
This wish of mine they'll ne'er fulfill.
But pray I may and hope that once
They better be and better still,
When God to prayer gives His response.

The Source of My Song

A friend of mine asked me,
It was but today,
"Whence comes your melody,
Whence comes your gentle lay?
I hear no music around,
I doubt there is song to be found.
I see little that's beautiful here.
I see less that's enjoyable near.
You seem so happy and gay;
You sing something new every day.
Now tell me, if you can,
What makes you so happy a man?"

I told my friend the truth.
I told it in verse:
"I see the bloom of youth:
I do not see the hearse.
My song comes out of the air.
It comes to me gentle and fair.
In the ether I find it complete.
If I wish it, there beauty I meet.
No wonder I'm cheerful and glad;
I find not a thing that is sad.
I do find music here,
And beauty is sure to be near.

"The air is full of joy;
The sunshine is gay;
The wind doth song employ;
The earth is kind all day.
Through all doth God show His love.
Through all doth He send from above
His sweet message of cheer and of peace,
Of music that never will cease.
He filled all creation with song,
And left it for us to prolong.
I'm glad His beauty I see,
That He gave this secret to me.

"What can I do but sing,
When God is so kind?
If still you're wondering,
Just keep this truth in mind,
That God and Nature and Man
Work together as one in His plan,
And that He in His wisdom did fill
All the earth and the heaven with a thrill
That you can feel, if you try,
And not let it all pass you by.
This is my reason true
That I have been singing to you."

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